

DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

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Sept. 23, 2005

TO: All State Employees Considering Red Cross Volunteer Work for Hurricane Relief

RE: American Red Cross Advice on Conditions in Affected Areas

The local chapter of the American Red Cross has asked DPA to pass along the following information to State employees considering whether to volunteer for hurricane relief field work in the southern states.

- You must be in excellent health and physically capable of lifting at least 50 lbs. Before you're sent into the field, Red Cross medical personnel evaluate your physical condition.
- Red Cross covers all expenses, including transportation, meals, and lodging (which in this case is likely to be a shelter).
- The areas hit by the recent hurricanes fall into virtually all of the Red Cross hardship categories (see list below), so be prepared to endure harsh conditions.

Red Cross Hardship Categories Applicable to the Hurricane Disaster Area

Water Disruption. The regular water system of the area may be affected by the disaster. This may result in the lack of public water service in shelters, hotels and work sites. The water may be unsafe to drink, requiring special precautions or use of bottled water. Other inconveniences could include inoperable restroom facilities, limited shower/bathing facilities and the need to carry water supplies for personal use.

Power Outage. Power outages may be widespread, sporadic and of an undetermined duration during a disaster. This may affect electric and/or gas utilities. The result may be no lights and no use of electrical appliances, including office machines, computers and cooking facilities. The power outage could also affect the use of elevators, heating, air conditioning, water pumps, traffic signals, communication sources and equipment with rechargeable batteries, as well as required health care equipment (e.g., CPAP machine — assists with sleep apnea).

Limited Food Availability. The relief operation may not be able to accommodate special dietary needs, and the food choices may be limited. Military rations may be the only source of food. Working and living locations may be isolated from nearby food sources. The demanding work schedules may not allow for regularly scheduled meals.

Extreme Heat and/or Humidity. Temperatures may average over 90 degrees Fahrenheit, and/or high humidity may be present. Air conditioning may not be available in housing or at work sites. Heat and humidity could affect those with a variety of conditions including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), skin disorders and photosensitivity reactions from certain medications. Humid climates can increase bacterial or fungal growth, making a healthy immune system essential.

Housing Shortages. Staff may have to share rooms with other workers, which may provide little or no privacy. The housing may be dormitory style with shared bathroom and shower facilities. There may be occasions when staff will be housed in a shelter for relief workers or, depending on the damage to the infrastructure, workers may be placed in shelters housing disaster clients.

Working Conditions. In some situations, the working environment can cause hardships. Work areas that are tight, noisy and/or perceived to be unsafe can be stressful for members. Field assignments may include walking on uneven or slippery terrain, walking long distances, getting in and out of vehicles multiple times, accessing homes, using stairs without handrails and working in tents. The conditions may require endurance and stamina, and the assignment may include long work hours.

Limited Health Care Access. Following a disaster, particularly in remote locations, the community infrastructure can be affected so that normal health care systems, including emergency medical services, are not in place or are difficult to access. In some medically underserved areas advanced cardiac life support, specialized procedures and medications are not available. This can cause a hardship for people with chronic medical conditions who might need a hospital or a doctor's attention. In some rural or island locations there may already be a shortage of specialized medical assistance that members may need on an ongoing basis due to certain disease processes. This hardship code includes members who have medical conditions that require frequent monitoring or have recurrent exacerbations.

Extreme Emotional Stress. Many stressors can occur during a disaster. Members may witness sickness, serious injury, distressed victims, death or mass casualties and destruction. Members may also be exposed to victims expressing grief, anger and frustration. There may be personal safety issues and possible recurrence of the disaster. Absence from personal support systems may contribute to these stressors.

Travel Conditions. Travel on the relief operation may be difficult. Roads may be congested, partially impassible or single lane. The relief operation covers a wide area and staff may routinely spend hours in transit while on the relief operation and then spend additional time commuting from their assigned work location to their housing. Due to the disaster, street signs may be missing and locations may be difficult to determine.

Transportation Limitations. Transportation to the relief operation may be complicated and difficult. The travel arrangements may require use of alternate routes, unusual or multiple connections, noncommercial/military carriers or assignment through a staging area. On the relief operation, transportation may be scarce, with options limited to walking, mass transit, van pool or car pool with three or more people. Transportation may also involve watercraft or small commuter planes that require physical agility to board.

Air Quality. Certain disasters may involve elements such as smoke, dust, ash and poor air quality. These have the potential of aggravating respiratory conditions such as COPD, emphysema and chronic asthma. Additionally, operations that include flooding increase the potential for mold and mildew, which may trigger allergic reactions, reactive airway disease (RAD) and asthma.

Lifting Limitation. Various disaster work assignments require members to lift and carry heavy items. If members attempt to lift and carry more than they are physically able, they may injure themselves or worsen already existing conditions. This code should be used when a member is not physically able to lift or carry the amount required by a specific activity. Occasionally, a member may be asked to lift and carry when it is not a normal part of his or her activity. In these

cases, each member is responsible for knowing his or her lifting limitations and avoiding harmful situations on disasters, regardless of the work assignment.